

A HISTORY of the FOX THEATRE and its MÖLLER ORGAN

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Note: The information of the specifics of this historic instrument were gathered by ATOS member James Thrower and were checked for accuracy by the “Phantom of the Fox” himself, Joe Patten.

Offered here are a few facts about the instrument:

- 1963: The organ’s traveler cable from the console to the junction board at the bottom of the orchestra pit was rewired.
- 1965: A 6’3” Baldwin Grand Piano originally from the Picadilly Theatre, Chicago Kilgen installation was added on a dedicated lift in the orchestra pit. The original Kilgen-built relay for the pressure action system was releathered (and again in 2001). This addition to the Fox Möller debuted with Bob Van Camp’s Concert Recording LP, *Here With the Wind* [CR 0023] c. 1967.
- 1980: A new reservoir for the Post Horn chest was installed...without tremulant attachment...to enable the other ranks that formerly shared this tremulant the ability to “shake” without affecting the Post Horn.
- 1985: Twelve notes of the 32’ Diaphone were added in unenclosed spaces originally prepared for these pipes. These locations are in front of the chamber enclosures on either side of the theatre. The pipes speak directly into the auditorium from the inside of each familiar chamber grille flanking the Fox stage. Also at this time a systematic program was initiated lasting for over two years to re-leather the entire organ, including percussions, relay pneumatics, chest pneumatics, and swell shutter pneumatics.
- 1986: A new 75-horsepower Spencer blower was installed to replace the original 30-horsepower kinetic blower, which was wearing out. The blower was undersized from the inception of the Möller’s installation, producing only 15” of static wind pressure (the new blower produces 35” of static wind). Also, a second motor generator was added to correct a voltage deficiency, which prevented the pipes in the Ethereal Organ Division to be played properly due to a lack of sufficient wind. (For the first 57 years of the Möller’s life, the organ had operated not only without enough wind, but it was without enough current to open all the magnets for the keys and stops that were depressed by the artist. In a way, this was a safety system—albeit by default—since the blower could not supply enough wind, and there wasn’t sufficient power to open enough valves, the blower was never overtaxed!)
- And 1986 also saw a complete system of air conditioning/heating and humidity controls separate from the auditorium proper was installed in all five chambers. The initial \$48,700.00 cost soon proved to be a wise investment, as maintenance and tuning costs have been very low since its installation. In the same year, all key coverings were completely replaced with new ivory.
- 1993: Damage from water and resulting fallen plaster in the 16’ Diaphones was repaired, and all five chambers were thoroughly cleaned and repainted.
- 1995: A Peterson-built relay and new Syndyne stop actions were installed on the “Tremulants”, “Couplers”, and “Second Touch” stop tabs to enable them to be ganged on the organ’s combination action for the first time. Formerly, they had to be operated manually, but they did have mechanical “cancels” for each section. However, the “cancels” were not selective (in other words, it was “all or none”).
- 2002: In addition to the re-leathering of the piano relay action for a second time, the Fox’s mammoth console was completely refinished in gold leaf and polychrome decoration consistent with the organ’s original motif.
- 2013: Tremulants in the organ were totally rebuilt and reconfigured to regain the wonderful theatrical shake despite increased static wind from the newer blower.

Thank You, Joe



Mr. Joe Patten

Photo: From the author’s personal archive

There would be no Möller—in fact, there would be no Atlanta Fox without ATOS Honorary Member Joe G. Patten...the ***Phantom of the Fox***. Patten’s uncompromising and constant caring for the Fox Möller from 1963 to 1974 on a part-time basis, and on a full-time basis until just recently will be readily apparent to the *Here With the Wind* audience. But moreover, that famous “room” he helped save from the wreckers, and from fire, and from doubting Thomases will beguile and transport you as if on a magic carpet to a land where fantasy and great music become one grande crescendo.